

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

Galatians 3

²³But before this faith came, we were held in custody under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith was revealed. ²⁴So the law was our chaperone until Christ, so that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a chaperone.

²⁶In fact, you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷Indeed, as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is not Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for you are all one and the same in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants and heirs according to the promise.



It was my prized possession when I was little, a card shuffler. One reason I prized it was that it was a gift from my Grandma and Grandpa Bode. The other reason I prized my card shuffler was because I loved to watch it work. All cards in a shuffler are subject to shuffling. None can escape the machine. There would be no difference in value to the shuffler between a spade and a club, a diamond or a heart, a red or a black, a number or a face-card.

In the same way there isn’t any difference to God about social stations in life. Ever since the promise of good news in Jesus Christ, God does not value His people on different levels. This is important for you to know, because the world is constantly telling us to ask who we are. Then we can be so labelled and arranged that the less valuable or the less useful are kicked aside.

At the same time, the world cannot sufficiently diversify. Nor can the world sufficiently unite. Our promise is that in Christ Jesus there is a unity as well as a diversity that the world could never boast. Africans today will recite the creed that just flowed from our lips. Asians will taste the sacrament. Europeans will witness a baptism, all in the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ alone begets a diverse and united family. He reshuffled the deck at His cross.

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST RESHUFFLES THE DECK

I. He has rescued all categories of people.

You must know that **the Galatians were made up of really two groups, Jews and non-Jews**. Paul had begun spreading the Word of Jesus among the Jews, but, when persecuted, took it to the Gentiles. Members of the church came from both groups as well as various social classes. But now, what does Paul say? In Christ Jesus all social stations, even those that are divinely ordained, are nothing.

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Paul introduces a math problem. How can people from all different groups end up together in Jesus? Paul chooses not to compound this problem, but to introduce an equals-sign. *As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.* All baptized believers equal one and the same in the Savior's name. Again, in Christ Jesus all social stations, even those that are divinely ordained, are nothing. There would be no difference in value to God between a spade and a club, a diamond or a heart, a red or a black, a number or a face-card.

Male, female, slave, free, Jew, Gentile, king, subject—these are of course good creatures of God. But for all their wisdom, righteousness, devotion, and authority ... in Christ, in the matter of salvation, **they amount to nothing.**

This applies especially to the divine Law. Where you put on Christ, there is no **Jew** any longer, no circumcision, no temple worship, no commandment-keeping. The conscience should learn that, through faith alone in Jesus Christ, Moses or the Law or the Jew never existed. Moses is incompatible with Christ. Moses came with the Law and various works and forms of worship, but Jesus Christ came with grace and righteousness, absolutely without the Law or demands of works. John 1:17 tells us, "*The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*"

Paul also rejected and condemned the wisdom and righteousness of the **Gentiles**. There were outstanding poets, historians, and political figures among the Gentiles: Aristotle, Xenophon, Cicero, Julius Caesar, etc. They were heroes with wisdom, great virtues, and accomplishments. But these are meaningless to God. Achievement? Performance? Virtue? Sanctity? Even justice?

None of this amounts to anything in the sight of God. **What does have value to God?** The **garment of Christ**, which we put on in **baptism**. Jesus Christ takes that identity you thought you had, the card you carry, the train you were on, and robes you with a new one.

No matter what humans achieve: A restaurant server diligently doing her duty, obeying her boss, serving faithfully; an independent woman building her career; a focused, loving husband avoiding pornography; a boss building the company for his family; children who listen, keep in line, and don't argue—these truly magnificent and outstanding gifts and works do not appease God with righteousness in His sight. In other worlds, whatever laws, ceremonies, rites, righteousness, and works there are, **NONE** of these can take away sins or deliver from death and the devil. **None of these supply God with His full demands.**

So Paul was saying to the Galatians, "Don't let people who say they preach the good news of Jesus enter your ranks and hint that you must also now be circumcised or follow the dietary laws of the Old Testament, even if GOD HIMSELF made that command." Salvation in Jesus is by grace alone. Jesus Christ takes that identity you thought you had, the card you carry, the train you were on, and robes you with a new one.

The Gospel sets Jesus Christ forth as the only One who placated the wrath of God by His own blood as the Savior. Without faith in Him, Jews will not be saved through the Law; the monk will not be saved through his religious order; the senator will not be saved through pure-hearted politics; the activist will not be saved through vocal protest; the homemaker will not be saved through a clean and organized house. **Only faith in Jesus rescues these different categories of people.**

Malady 1. I saw a nice sign recently. "Find a passion and pursue it. Fall in love. Dream big. Drink wine. Eat great food. Spend quality time with good friends." You might say these items on a rich list of advice. You might say that there's no way these things are intended theologically, or intended to say something about God. But if we Christians did not have the Ten Commandments to know what is

right or wrong (or despite the fact that you do!), would you not consider these directions for a rich and full life? These are a whole new set of commandments! Isn't that scary?

"Laugh every day. Tell stories. Reminisce but look ahead with optimism. Travel often. Learn more. Be creative. Love with all your heart. Never give up. Be true to who you are. Smile often. Be grateful. Follow your dreams." Would you take these as gospel truth? Would you realize these are actually law, not gospel? "Try new things. Work hard. Embrace change. Be nice to everyone. Be happy. Live for today. And above all ... make every moment count." Sounds like gospel because it's a nice message, but this is really what Scripture means when it uses the word "law." It's crushing. What is your takeaway? If I don't do these things, I will not live life well. None of these things are done for me. No one can do them on my behalf. This list will chaperone you to the realization that we cannot live life quite right.

But there is someone who has. He robes us in His identity at baptism. He offers us His I.D. card of clearance before the Father. He checks us into the book of life, writing your name in with big fancy letters. By faith alone, which baptism works, God brings any different and diverse set of people crushed under the laws of this and every other world, and creates a family of saved people.

II. All believers have Him.

... for you are all one and the same in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants and heirs according to the promise.

The remarkable truth in verse 29 is that **God's Gospel shuffles the deck into new, unprecedented stacks**. He transfers all the glory of Lebanon to the desert; that is, He makes all the Gentiles the offspring of Abraham and transfers to them the fatherhood and blessing promised to Abraham. God through Paul's words forces the unbelievers of Jewish descent, who drank in His land of milk and honey, out to the desert; and He ushers the non-Jews, the barbarians and the slaves as well as the free and the civilized into Abraham's tent.

This was predicted long ago, already to Abraham himself, when God said, "*Through your offspring shall all nations be blessed*" (Gen. 22:18). As we Gentiles believe, then through faith in Jesus we receive the blessing of the Offspring of Abraham. **Therefore the Bible calls us sons of Abraham and thus heirs.**

Now all of the prophecies have a new fulfillment, a new song to sing, and a new Son to share them. Through faith in Jesus, the definition of riches is reshuffled. Instead of silver, gold, and diamonds, our riches are the blood of Jesus, removal of our debt record with God, and the holy city of heaven. Instead of power and greed, we are given light and belonging and rest. Instead of crushing blows for who we once were—objects of God's wrath because of our very real sin—**we inherit** the arms of the Good Shepherd in the pastures of His safekeeping. And all this comes for the sake of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who won our inheritance.

Malady 2. One problem that people develop is that they believe our sins unite us. It is true that sin levels the playing field. "*There is no difference,*" we are told, "*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" There is no respecting persons as far as sin goes. But it is rather unchristian to use the line, "We are all sinners, and no one should cast the first stone," as if that forgives our sins. That doesn't unify people, but that only legislates the problem full-scale. (Not to mention, it mingles and admixes the two basic doctrines of the Bible; that is, Law and Gospel, meeting sin with complacency.) One can certainly SAY, "We are all sinners, and no one should cast the first stone." But when? To say that uses the Law as St. Paul means to do here in verses 23-25: A chaperone that brings us to know that we each need a savior of some kind ... A ruling that leaves us hopeless and searching for

good news ... A showing of our sin (SOS) so that we might possibly reach out and take hold of a hem of the garment of God's baptismal promises.

What truly unites us is not a soft Law. It is not okay that we are all sinners, and that is not a good final word on any matter. The record of sin is a real problem that needs an eternal, soul-suffering Savior! The fact that we have a Savior who fills our hearts, who solves our most dire need, and who stills our souls with the forgiveness of sins – this unites a family in one name, and that is Jesus Christ alone.

That's good. That's very good news. **How good does it get?** The same Christ belongs to all these people. The same Christ whom Peter, Paul, and all the saints have, we have too. You and I and all believers, even all baptized infants? We have the same Christ, too. He doesn't come to us in levels, not even in the sacraments. He took an unconscionable burden and endured the punishment with perfect willingness. Do you think that Jesus Christ wasted His life on the rich, innocent, leveled-up Christians?? Jesus Christ spent His body and soul in full view of the poor, the lowly, the last places in life, the fool, the frivolous, the prodigals, the scum of the earth, even you, even me.

All believers have Him. The gospel reshuffles the deck. There are good works to do in the name of Jesus. His fate is in your hands and your soul is in His. This is the truth. Let's play.

In Jesus' name, Amen.